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PROSPECTS FOR U.S.-RUSSIAN COOPERATION IN NUCLEAR
NONPROLIFERATION IN A TIME OF *COLD PEACE*¹

I first began to write about similarities and differences in Washington and Moscow’s approach to nuclear nonproliferation over 25 years ago. At that time, very much at the height of the Cold War, I was struck by the degree of parallelism and cooperation on this issue that took place between the two ideological adversaries and military rivals. By examining the nature of this cooperation, I was hopeful that one might derive lessons that could be applicable in other areas of superpower relations.

As I reviewed what I had written long ago in preparation for this essay, I was particularly struck by two chapters I found in a book I co-edited in 1985. In one chapter, a young Soviet second secretary at the United Nations – Sergey Kislyak – wrote about the importance the Soviet Union attached to further strengthening the effectiveness of the IAEA safeguards system (including full-scope safeguards), the significant nonproliferation role played by strict regulation of nuclear exports through both domestic legislation and multilateral nuclear supplier guidelines, the great importance the Soviet Union attached to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, the contribution of the Soviet Union’s «no first use» pledge to the prevention of nuclear war, and the fact that «there is no alternative to the NPT in the contemporary world.»² Recognizing the inherent tension between the pursuit of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and its potential misuse for weapons purposes, Kislyak presciently promoted the concept of international fuel cycle services and expressed the Soviet Union’s support for the creation of regional nuclear fuel centers under IAEA supervision.³

Jumping forward over two decades in time, one may ponder how relevant many of these perspectives are today, and which ones would be supported by the recently appointed Russian ambassador to the United States – Mr. Sergey Kislyak.

In the same book from 1985, I wrote a chapter entitled «U.S.-Soviet Cooperative Measures for Nonproliferation.» In it, I observed the rather extraordinary degree to which Soviet and U.S. nuclear export and nonproliferation policy had evolved in similar directions, the persistence of U.S.-Soviet cooperation during periods of extreme stress (e.g., following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan) and across both Democratic and Republican administrations. This cooperation found expression in a variety of multilateral fora such as the NPT Review Process, meetings of the IAEA Board of Governors and General Conference, the Zangger Committee and the London Suppliers Group, and the International Nuclear Fuel Evaluation (INFCE). Between the mid- 1970s and late 1980s there also were regular, bilateral consultations on nonproliferation every six months at an ambassadorial level.

In my chapter I also noted that the possibilities for cooperative action were not without political costs and that conditions conducive to nonproliferation cooperation would not necessarily persist indefinitely. More specifically, with respect to the Soviet Union, I pointed to the potential for less prudent export behavior to emerge if economic factors should begin to trump non-proliferation considerations or if the Soviet leadership should conclude that proliferation was



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inevitable and could at best be managed. The crucial factor determining Soviet behavior in the aforementioned scenarios, I argued, would be the posture toward nonproliferation taken by the United States and other Western nuclear supplier countries. «Particularly under conditions in which superpower relations are strained,» I wrote, «U.S. actions that appear to weaken the nonproliferation regime might prompt Soviet decision makers to reassess the foreign policy assets and liabilities of insisting on stringent export controls and international safeguards.... [and lead them] to pursue nuclear trade more actively for political and economic purposes.» It was therefore important, I argued, «for the United States and its Western allies to reinforce Soviet nonproliferation restraint by the example of their own behavior.»⁴

POLICY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

I cite these two perspectives from the 1980s both to highlight the fact that cooperation between Washington and Moscow was well established long before the collapse of the Soviet Union and was based on very sober calculations about shared interests, and to call attention to factors other than the state of bilateral relations that have a bearing on the potential for continued cooperation.

Perhaps most striking in comparing the U.S.-Soviet/Russian relationship in the mid-1980s with that of 2008 is the very uneven record of cooperation between Washington and Moscow since the demise of the Soviet Union. To be sure, there has been considerable continuity in the rhetoric of nonproliferation cooperation during the past 25 years. One also can point to a number of substantive accomplishments in the post-Soviet period, the most notable of which relate to the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, which has played a major role in enhancing the security of Russian nuclear weapons and materials. Other positive instances of joint action include the indefinite extension of the NPT, denuclearization of the DPRK, and repatriation of Soviet-origin highly-enriched uranium under the Global Threat Reduction Initiative. In some important respects, however, cooperation actually has regressed since the end of the Cold War – and began long before the recent events in Georgia or plans to deploy missile defenses in Eastern Europe. These policy differences reflect divergent U.S. and Russian nuclear threat perceptions and preferred nonproliferation strategies, including the relative emphasis given to economic, military, and international legal political instruments in countering perceived proliferation threats, as well as the diminished influence of organizational advocates for nonproliferation in Washington and Moscow. In both countries, the prevailing philosophy appears to be one of seeking maximum flexibility for one's own nuclear posture, even if that means sacrificing significant nonproliferation initiatives.

Also contributing to the lack of incentive structure for cooperation on the U.S. side – most pronounced during the George W. Bush era – is the growth of a set of assumptions about proliferation that include the belief that nuclear proliferation is inevitable; the perception that there are «good proliferators» and «bad proliferators» and that one should apply different standards for nonproliferation compliance to selected states; a view that multilateral mechanisms are ineffectual in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons; and the conviction that regional security considerations trump those of global proliferation.

Although these tendencies or prevailing views are most pronounced in the United States, one also can observe their growing influence among Russian officials. As such, one may soon find a convergence of U.S. and Russian assumptions about and principles governing nuclear weapons spread, but ones that discourage rather than encourage greater U.S.-Russian cooperation for nonproliferation. The most recent and powerful example of this phenomenon was U.S.-Russian complicity in bullying reluctant NSG members to exempt India from well established export restraints.

Having tried to make the case that US-Russian cooperation for nonproliferation in the post-Cold War often was less than presidential summits would lead one to believe, it also is the case that a series of events – culminating in the Georgian conflict – have raised serious questions about the underlying compatibility between U.S. and Russian security interests and the extent to which nonproliferation cooperation continues to serve mutual interests.

A number of Russian scholars, for example, have suggested that the Kremlin regards the United States as not only increasingly untrustworthy but as a source of global instability.⁵ At the same time, it has elevated the role of nuclear weapons in its own security policy and devalued the centrality of the relationship with the United States in providing for Russian security and strategic stability. According to this perspective, not only are nuclear arms reductions such as those called for by George Shultz, Sam Nunn, Henry Kissinger, and William Perry unlikely, they may be undesirable. Moreover, given Russia's current foreign policy agenda, greater effort will need to be invested in the development of relations with other countries, some of whom may covet nuclear weapons.

A mirror image view is held by some senior U.S. officials, who today are even more disinclined than previously to cooperate with Russia in extending legally-binding arms control agreements, supporting Cooperative Threat Reduction measures, providing no-first use guarantees, or otherwise diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security policy.

PROSPECTS FOR COOPERATION

Given the uneven record of cooperation between Washington and Moscow on nuclear nonproliferation in the past two decades and the further downturn in relations following the conflict in Georgia, what realistic prospects are their in the short term for preserving existing areas of collaboration and expanding them to other sectors? Much will depend on the extent to which cool heads prevail – something that is by no means assured. Nevertheless, I believe there are at least nine areas in which it may be possible for the United States and Russia to work together on nonproliferation issues in a mutually beneficial fashion. They are, in telegraphic form:

1. Resume routine and regular consultations on nonproliferation problems. Unlike the high-level semi-annual consultations during the period between the mid-1970s and the 1980s, there currently is no regularly scheduled forum at which senior U.S. and Russian officials meet to review a broad range of nuclear proliferation issues. Although such consultations would not ensure cooperation in dealing with difficult proliferation problems, the absence of a regular forum hinders the exchange of information and the coordination of policy.

2. Collaborate in the safeguarding of sensitive fuel cycle technology through the promotion of regional nuclear fuel centers. The United States and Russia both recognize the proliferation risks posed by the spread of sensitive nuclear fuel technologies. What remains to be seen is the relative degree to which nonproliferation or economic considerations will drive each country's approach to regional nuclear fuel centers and the potential for centers such as the Angarsk facility in Russia to offer meaningful assurances to countries of nonproliferation concern. Although there currently is little interest in the multinational fuel centers on the part of those states for whom fuel assurances are designed, the approach has merit and is deserving of joint support.

3. Undertake joint efforts to enhance IAEA safeguards. Both countries routinely have endorsed the Additional Protocol as the international safeguards standard, but were slow to put the AP in place for themselves. The U.S.-India nuclear deal has not been helpful in this regard as it demonstrates the readiness of both the United States and Russia to put aside nonproliferation considerations in favor of economic interests. Nevertheless, it should prove possible for the United States and Russia to expand cooperation in the area of strengthening IAEA safeguards, especially if Russia expands its paltry contribution to the IAEA safeguards regular budget of \$125 million (Russia currently contributes only 1.1 percent of the budget in contrast to the U.S. contribution of 25 percent and the Japanese contribution of 19 percent).

4. Facilitate entry into force of the CTBT. There is no chance that the Bush administration will alter course and support U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The prospects for U.S. ratification, however, are much better in the forthcoming Obama administration, especially given the significant gains made by the Democrats in the Senate. Joint U.S.-Russian support for the CTBT would have a very powerful symbolic effect and would almost certainly lead to Chinese ratification. Hopefully, Russian revisionism on nuclear arms control



treaties will not lead to reconsideration by Moscow of the value of the CTBT just as Washington returns to the fold.

5. *Combat nuclear terrorism.* Although U.S. and Russian views differ regarding the likelihood and degree of danger posed by different forms of nuclear terrorism – most Russian government officials take a more skeptical view than their U.S. counterparts about the possibility that terrorists could obtain and make even a crude nuclear explosive device – there remains a convergence of interests in denying non-state actors access to both fissile and other radioactive material. Both the United States and Russia are especially wary of the nuclear terrorism risks posed by Islamic terrorists. As such, it should be possible to fashion greater cooperation in areas such as implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1540, minimization of HEU in the civilian nuclear sector, and acceleration of the Global Threat Reduction Initiative. Regrettably, and notwithstanding repeated presidential summit statements to the contrary, there appears to be little prospect that headway will be made in the critical area of sharing intelligence information regarding illicit nuclear trafficking.


6. *Extend existing treaties and voluntary measures.* Russian officials have escalated their criticism of a number of existing bilateral nuclear arms control agreements and U.S. officials in the Bush administration have made clear their own reservations about some of these accords. Prior to the Georgian conflict Moscow stressed the importance of renewing key provisions of the START I and SORT treaties, while Washington dallied. Once the new U.S. administration assumes office the roles are likely to be reversed. The situation is even worse in those nuclear sectors for which there are not formal international agreements, such as the 1991–1992 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives. Although it will be difficult to close the gap between U.S. and Russian views about the costs and benefits of these measures – as well as the INF Treaty – there is a reasonable prospect that the new Obama administration will be able to make a persuasive case for extending for at least a short period of time the START and SORT treaties, while negotiators consider longer-term solutions that address the issues of verification.

7. *Cooperate under the umbrella of the P-5.* At a time when bilateral collaboration is difficult, it may be possible to pursue parallel and coordinated action on nonproliferation through the mechanism of the P-5, i.e., the five permanent members of the Security Council. This mechanism has been used to good effect in the context of the NPT review process, and a P-5 statement at the outset of the 2000 Review Conference made it possible to remove one of the most contentious issues from the Conference debate – namely ballistic missile defense. Interestingly, although the P-5 were unable to agree on a joint statement at the disappointing 2005 Review Conference, a common position was hammered out at the 2008 Prep Com and provides a good starting point for development of forward looking approach as we approach the 2010 Review Conference.

8. *Pursue joint ballistic missile defense.* Proposed BMD deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic are arguably the most acute but unnecessary source of contention in the current U.S.-Russian nonproliferation relationship. They are acute because Russia rightly or wrongly perceives the deployments to be part of a much larger long-term effort to deny Russia a significant nuclear retaliatory capability; they are unnecessary because even if the defenses functioned as planned – a big «if» – there is no urgency to begin the deployment process now against a threat that is at best inchoate. Although the Georgian conflict has made it less likely for Democrats in Congress to delay funding for BMD deployment, former President Putin's proposal for a joint missile defense system still provides a useful framework for discussion about cooperation in missile defense, and should be pursued.

9. *Come to grips with NATO enlargement.* Although not technically a nonproliferation issue, the prospect of further NATO enlargement, especially as it pertains to Georgia and Ukraine, is probably the greatest irritant in U.S.-Russian relations and the issue most likely to lead to a dangerous confrontation. To the extent that this irritant can be reduced, both the nonproliferation and broader U.S.-Russian political agenda can be greatly improved. Although one must be cautious not to assume that the Democratic victory in November 2008 will necessarily translate into a creative resolution of the NATO enlargement controversy, prospects for resolving the issue certainly have improved with the defeat of the Republican presidential ticket.

CONCLUSION

U.S. and Soviet leaders during the Cold War learned the value of nuclear cooperation the hard way after both sides contributed to the global spread of nuclear weapons and came frighteningly close to their use. It would be tragic for contemporary leaders of the United States and Russia to forget this lesson or their common stake in preventing a nuclear Armageddon. I believe it is a point with which Ambassador Kislyak and I continue to agree. 

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this article was prepared for the 2008 Gstaad Process, Gstaad, Switzerland, September 25-26, 2008.

² Sergey I. Kislyak, "A Soviet Perspective on the Future of Nonproliferation," in Rodney W. Jones, Cesare Merlini, Joseph F. Pilat, and William C. Potter (eds.), *The Nuclear Suppliers and Nonproliferation: International Policy Choices* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985), pp. 211-218.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁴ William C. Potter, "U.S.-Soviet Cooperative Measures for Nonproliferation," in Jones et al., p. 14.

⁵ See, for example, Vladimir Orlov, "US-Russian Relations on Nonproliferation After the Georgia Crisis: A Skeptical Re(engagement) or an Un(happy) Divorce?" Paper prepared for the Monterey Nonproliferation Strategy Group, Monterey, CA, August 20-21, 2008.

